

Do No Harm

**The Imperative for “Racing ACEs” and
Linking Embodied Individual and Systemic Healing
Of Racial Trauma**

**A Presentation for the
The Maryland Department of Health
FIRST ANNUAL RACISM AND MENTAL HEALTH
SYMPOSIUM**

**S. Ileana Lindstrom, M.Div., PhD
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Welcome! * Agenda

- ***“RACING ACEs”*: The ACE Study and a Missing Essential Component**
- **RACING RESILIENCE: Community Resilience Must Be Contextualized Within Historical Trauma and Structural Racial Inequities**
- **EMBODIED HEALING OF INDIVIDUAL & COLLECTIVE RACIAL TRAUMA:**
 - **Intro to Embodied/Somatic Understanding of Healing Trauma.**
 - **Individual & Collective Healing → Interdependent.**
 - **Must Include Analysis of Social Conditions (E.g., Political, Economic, & Historical Systems).**



Adverse Childhood Experiences

The ACE Study

First Study 1998.
Longitudinal

17,000+ participants

ACE data still
collected, e.g., in
every State.

Results

- Childhood trauma →
Adult chronic
disease &
compromised
mental health

↑Types of trauma

↑Risk

87% Participants had
more than one ACE.

The ACE Study: Child Data

- More than $2/3^{\text{rds}}$ of all U.S. school-aged children experience one or more ACEs.
- Approx. 25% of U.S. children will experience at least one traumatic event by age 16 years.
- Children with 2+ ACEs: 2.67 times more likely to repeat a grade, *plus...*

Healing Invisible Wounds: Why Investing in Trauma-Informed Care for Children Makes Sense (2010, July); Justice Policy Institute; Retrieved from: <http://www.modelsforchange.net/publications/269.>]

Outcomes of ACEs in Adults

- Homelessness
- Obesity
- Heart Disease
- Mental Health Disorders
- Suicide
- Unintended Pregnancy
- STDs
- Substance Abuse
- Unhealthy Coping Behaviors (e.g., Gambling)

Prevalence of Trauma (Courtois, 2014)

- **80% of US citizens: exposed to/direct experience of trauma.**
- **Majority of adult trauma survivors (75%):**
 - **posttraumatic reactions –yes. PTSD—no.**
- **Approx. 25% of adult trauma survivors do progress to PTSD.**

RACING ACEs

- **History of *Racing ACEs***
- **The Value of and the Problem with the ACE Study**

Racing ACEs

The Evidence of Science

Racism: A “Socially Transmitted Disease”
Interventions Must Include the
Sociopolitical Level (American
Academy of Pediatrics 2019 Statement:
*The Impact of Racism on Child and
Adolescent Health*)

Racing ACEs

The Evidence of Science

Socioeconomic & environmental barriers to children's health quality resources → Toxic Stress →

- **Disruption of early brain architecture.**
- **Increased risk infections and chronic diseases.**
- **Neg. Effects Gene Expression:
Multigenerational impact.**

**(National Institute for Children's Health
Quality/NICHQ: 2019)**

Racing ACEs

The Evidence of Science

- **Macro-Level (aka Structural Racism) & Micro-Level (e.g., Microaggressions) → Increased Inflammation & Chronic Diseases**

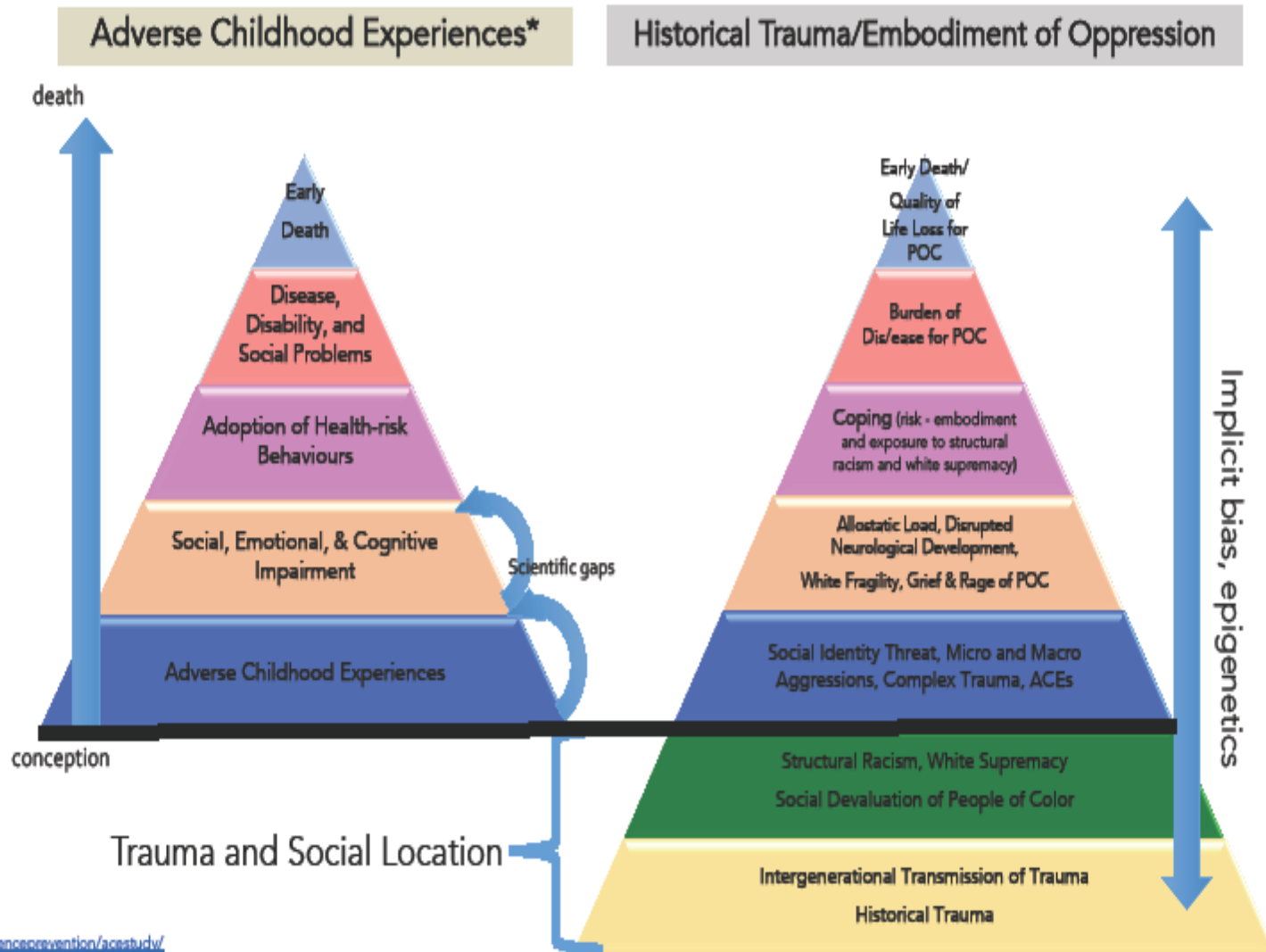
(Journal of Psychoneuroendocrinology, 2019)

- ***Racial Trauma*: Race-based stress → the events of danger & related real or perceived experience of racial discrimination; e.g., threats of harm & injury; humiliating/shaming events; witnessing harm to other PoC--incl Indigenous Peoples--due to real or perceived racism.**

(APA's *American Psychologist* Jan, 2019 Special Issue: *Racial Trauma: Theory, Research, and Healing*)

Racing ACEs

if it's not racially just, it's not trauma informed



<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/>
Adapted by RYSE, 2016

DR. JOY DEGRUY

<https://vimeo.com/47616893>



RESILIENCE is...

- “an innate capacity to rebound from adversity and change through a process of positive adaptation. “ *MindResilience: Nurture Your Well-Being*
<http://www.mindresilience.org/what-is-mind-resilience/#coreconceptsage>
- “a process linking a set of adaptive capacities to a positive trajectory of functioning and adaptation after a disturbance.”
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/5691020_Community_Resilience_as_a_Metaphor_Theory_Set_of_Capacities_and_Strategy_for_Disaster_Readiness

RESILIENCE is ...

- “the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress, such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems or workplace and financial stressors. It means ‘bouncing back from difficult experiences.” <https://www.apa.org/helpcenter/road-resilience>

- International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies, 2013: The Jury’s Still Out!

https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/7ace/289f462eb7c9157d7ec9722e4e256ec157b1.pdf?_ga=2.128904460.1202098384.1567885769-295048802.1567885769

RACING RESILIENCE: RESILIENCE IN THE CONTEXT OF HISTORICAL TRAUMA

Resilience understood as according to these four core concepts:

- A multidimensional process that can be predicted.
- A reflection of individual capacity formed over a lifetime of exposures & experiences.

(Cont'd)

RACING RESILIENCE: RESILIENCE IN THE CONTEXT OF HISTORICAL TRAUMA

Resilience understood as...(cont'd)

- An outcome of a given physical & social ecology to provide the resources necessary to sustain well-being.
- An expression of the sociopolitical context in which individuals live & communities are formed.

Werner, E. E., & Smith, R. S. (1992). *Overcoming the odds: High risk children from birth to adulthood*. Ithaca, NY, US: Cornell University Press.



Stop calling me

RESILIENT

Because every time you say,
"Oh, they're resilient,"
that means you can
do something else to me.

I am not resilient.

Tracie L. Washington - Louisiana Justice Institute

RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

Community Resilience: The ability of a community to recover from and/or thrive despite the prevalence of adverse conditions.

Building Resilience: Putting the conditions in place in your community to (1) heal from past trauma, including racial trauma; & (2) be protected from the impact of future racial trauma.

[Prevention Institute:

https://www.preventioninstitute.org/publications/adverse-community-experiences-and-resilience-framework-addressing-and-preventing_]

Building Resilient Communities

- Know the history of racial trauma.
- Do the analysis: Identify the policies, practices, & procedures that are evidence of structural racism.
- Know the history of race-based resilience in your community (Racing Resilience):
 - Interview people, e.g., elders; research audio/visual archives; document it (media).
- Support intergenerational transmission of race-based resilience by embedding that resilience in the community's culture (e.g., the arts, observances of its history, community celebrations and other rituals, etc.)

Embodied/Somatic Healing

Somatics

- ❑ A field of study about, and practices related to, ways of working with individuals and groups that raise awareness of, honor, and engage the subjective experience of the body.
- ❑ Represents a diverse and wide range of body work, mind/body work, and physical movement approaches.

Somatic Definition of Trauma

Staci K. Haines: *The Politics of Trauma*

□ Trauma is

- an experience,
- a series of experiences, and/or
- impacts from social conditions that
- break or betray our inherent need for safety, belonging, and dignity.

□ Having to choose between/among inherent needs.

- Examples:
 - “I can be safe but not connected (isolated).”
 - “I have to give up my dignity to be safe or connected.”
 - Untenable outcomes: All of these needs are constitutive or inherent in us.

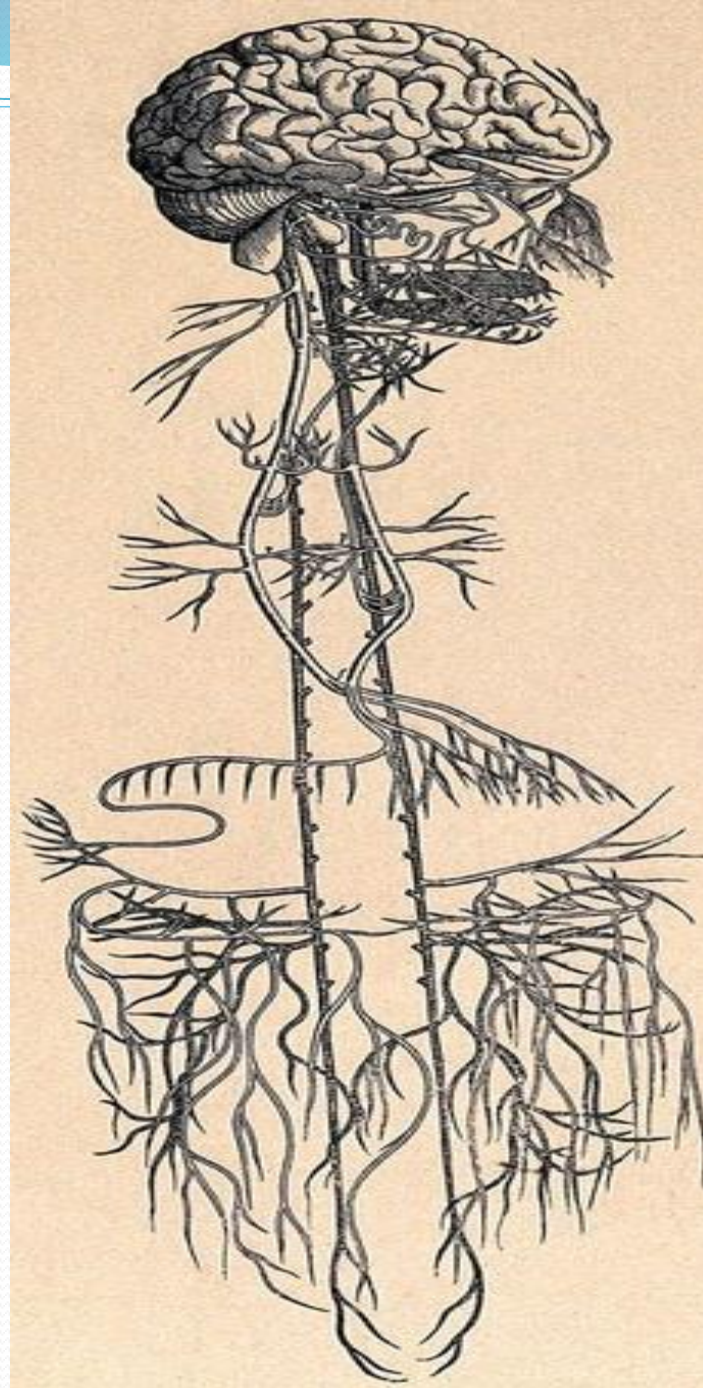
Somatic Definition of Trauma

Staci K. Haines: *The Politics of Trauma*

- **Direct or indirect experience/s (e.g., witnessing violence).**
- **Most experiences caused by human and/or by human-designed sociocultural and institutional systems (e.g., political, economic).**
- **Deeply harmful. Why? We are biological, evolutionary, emotional, social, & psychological beings. We need each other to co-regulate our nervous systems.**
- **Trauma is an individual and social experience. Important to know this to heal its effects.**

Embodied White Supremacy: How?

- Our Vagus Nerve
(aka *The Wandering Nerve*)
- Our Reptilian Brain
- Racial Trauma is in the Body



Racial Trauma

Intergenerational Transmission

Intergenerational Transmission Through:

- Learned Behaviors.
- Unsafe/abusive systems, structures, institutions, cultural norms.
- Repeated traumatization and patterns of trauma reactivity.
- Genetic transmission.

Racial Trauma (No. America)

Timeline of Somatic Periods

- Start approx. 1,500+ years ago.
- European countries: Powerful people brutal punishments on (mostly) poor/marginalized people → Traumatization reactions fight/flee to No. America.
- Colonized white people.
- Africans forcibly imported to No. America; enslavement → Traumatized.
- Decimation of Native American people; theft of their land → Traumatized.
- Late 1700's: First appearance of “white” persons in legislation. “Whiteness” invented.
- “White” bodies become standard/norm of humanity.
- White supremacy culture; cont'd traumatization of PoC.

Racial Trauma:

Embodied Foundations for Healing

- **Recognizing, accepting, & moving *through*, not around, discomfort & pain.**
- **Courage over fear.**
- **Giving up what's familiar but also harmful.**
- **Find our best self & ground in our integrity.**
- **No guarantee of safety.**
- **Foundations for healing happens in our settled, present body, not our brain.**

The alternatives: Responding from our most wounded self, using avoidance, blame, denial, fight, flight, etc. We create more pain for ourselves and others.

Racial Trauma

Settling the Body: A Foundation for Healing

Adapted from Resmaa Menakem's *My Grandmother's Hands*; 2017, p.168)

When you *feel* discomfort and a conflict escalating ...

- 1. Soothe yourself to slow down your mind/thinking and heart-rate, & settle your body.**
- 2. Bring your attention to sensations, flashpoints within your body (energy, heat, stimulation), and location/s of emotions in your body. Just notice these instead of reacting to them.**
- 3. Bravely choose to “be with” the discomfort, dis-ease, & distress. Notice how & when these change, staying with them rather than trying to ignore, “escape” from, or distract yourself.**

(Cont'd→)

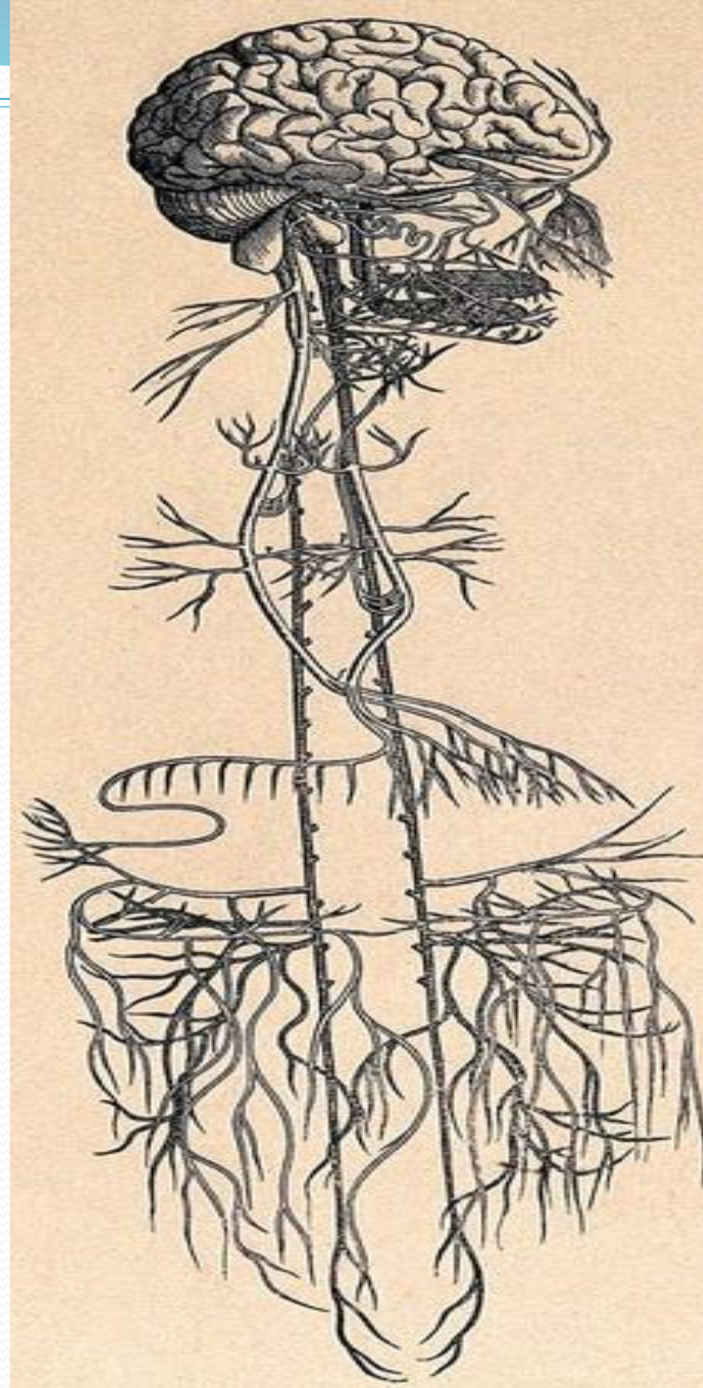
Racial Trauma

Settling the Body: A Foundation for Healing

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- 4. Maintain your awareness of & be attentive to the experiences in your body as they unfold, change in frequency, intensity, & location in the body. Courageously, try to stay present with & through the uncertainty, the unknown.**
- 5. With self-compassion and in a safe manner, release any energy remaining in your body**





Embodied/Somatic Anti-Racism Activism

- ❑ Begins with your own—settled, present—body.

“Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation and that is an act of political warfare.”

[Audre Lorde]

- ❑ Activism itself can be an effective mode of healing.
- ❑ Individual and collective racial trauma healing:
 - ❑ Interdependent.
 - ❑ Intertwined with social conditions (political, economic, historical structures & systems).
 - ❑ Must include:
 - ❑ An analysis of these social conditions.
 - ❑ Your involvement in systemic change (e.g., through community organizing or a social justice organization).

The smallest incidents of our social life contain all the moral and political values of society, all its structures of domination and power, all its mechanisms of oppression.

~ Augusto Boal

Embodied Community

Anti-Racism Activism: Where to Begin?

- 1. Do your own individual body work.**
- 2. Serve and work *for others*.**
- 3. Serve, work shoulder-to-shoulder *with others*.**

[Adapted from Rae Johnson: Embodied Activism;

<https://raejohnsonsonomatic.com/>]

Embodied Healing of Individual and Collective Racial Trauma

- The embodied healing of individual and collective racial trauma must include an integration of an analysis of social conditions (e.g., political, economic, historical systems).

“We see *healing justice* as necessary in a society that criminalizes Blackness, and structurally ensures trauma for *Black people*.”

[Black Lives Matter: www.blacklivesmatter.com]

At the Intersection of Economic, Political, Historical, & Social Conditions in the U.S.: *The Root Causes of Racial Trauma & the Path to Healing*



Thank you for your interest and attention!



LIMINAL SOLUTIONS PSYCHOTHERAPY AND CONSULTING, LLC

<https://liminalsolutionpsychotherapy.com/lsp/>

818 HIGH STREET, SUITE 4
CHESTERTOWN, MD 21620

410-699-0093

drlindstrom@liminalsolutionpsychotherapy.com

S. ILEANA LINDSTROM, M.DIV., PHD